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STATE FOR AF/W, PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/19/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TO](#)
SUBJECT: TOGO: ELECTION DEVELOPMENTS - OPPOSITION BOYCOTT -
PROBABLY JUST EMPTY POSTURING

Classified By: Ambassador Patricia M. Hawkins for reasons 1.4 (d)
and (b)

SUMMARY: Without warning, and contrary to expectations, the two major opposition parties suddenly announced a boycott of the presidential election if the GOT does not accept a change in the voting procedure to hold two voting rounds. Although the UFC and the CAR have continued to insist that the voting procedure must be changed, the issue seemed to have dropped off the radar screen of late as everyone concentrated on the goings on in the CENI and the tight timetable for election preparations. Suddenly, the UFC issued a statement to the press threatening to boycott the elections, and demanding another trip to Ouagadougou for a session with the mediator, Blaise Campaore. The CAR issued its own statement within days, saying the same thing. Nothing has been heard from the other, smaller parties. END SUMMARY

¶1. On Friday, November 12, Gilchrist Olympio, leader of the major opposition party, the UFC, visited the CMR to reiterate his concerns that the Government and ruling party (RPT) were conniving to steal the election from him. He requested assistance from the USG to provide each of the 6,000 voting bureaus with computers, so that they could transmit the voting results more quickly, and avoid the transport of voting boxes - always an opportunity for ballot box stuffing. After a brief discussion of the difficulties of this plan, he abandoned that request and asked for some computer equipment for the party headquarters, commenting that all the equipment they had used in the last election had been destroyed by the military. (Note: He was referring to the 2003 and 2005 elections, not the 2007 legislatives. End Note.) I suggested that the UFC investigate using notebook computers that could be easily concealed and that were relatively inexpensive. Then, after asking me to intercede in the visa case of a nephew, Olympio casually dropped the news that he still expected the government to go back to Ouagadougou and negotiate the question of two voting rounds. He waved away any discussion of the constitution and the impossibility of changing it this close to the election, dismissed the idea that the RPT would never accept this change, and assured me that he would prevail with the help of President Campaore. Throughout the conversation Olympio seemed tired and distracted, and was not really focused in his conversation. He repeatedly addressed me as Madame Rawlings. I presumed that the real object of the visit was the visa case, since he did not dwell on any of the requests or political issues at any length or with any insistence.

¶2. That afternoon, without any warning, the UFC issued a statement calling on the government to change the voting procedure to two rounds and threatening to boycott the election if it did not. The statement went into detail about the history of one vs. two rounds, referring to the

Constitution of 1992, and the unilateral changes made in 2003 and called on the population, including political parties, civil society, labor unions, the media, religious groups, students, all the "living forces" of the nation to mobilize and organize to obtain "by whatever means" the re-establishment of two rounds of voting.

¶3. Three days later, the CAR, using much the same language, issued its own statement, calling on the facilitator to open new talks with all the Togolese political actors to settle this question. The CAR also announced that it would not participate in an election if there were not two rounds.

¶4. Reaction was been muted, and there has been little in the press since Tuesday. At least one opposition paper published an article mildly critical of the UFC, asking about the timing, since this subject had not figured largely in previous talks, and commenting that Olympio had been more concerned with assuring his ability to run, rather than changing the voting procedure.

¶5. Minister of the Interior, Pascal Bodjona, the GOT's representative to the CENI and person in charge of the election, told a meeting of the election steering committee (committee de pilotage) that this was a diversionary act on the part of the opposition, which was not ready to contest the election. A prominent member of the UFC and an advisor to Olympio told me that he could not understand why Olympio had signed such a statement, and speculated that it was urged on him by Jean-Pierre Fabre, the most radical of the UFC steering committee. There has been speculation that Fabre and Habia, a member of the UFC youth group, are struggling for control of the party after Olympio exits, but we have no hard evidence of this.

¶6. COMMENT: There is no possible reason for the GOT and the RPT to even consider changing the voting procedure. While certainly disturbing in the short term, this move on the part of the UFC does seem to be an empty threat. This is Gilchrist Olympio's last chance to run in a presidential election and he has expended too much time, effort and credibility in assuring that his candidacy would be approved to pull out now. Such a move would hand the RPT the election on a silver platter, and utterly destroy the UFC's standing. The CAR probably followed the UFC lead, fearing to be marginalized as an opposition party if it did not toe the line. Despite this distraction, post is convinced that the GOT will hold the election as planned on February 28, 2010, whether there is an opposition party running or not. END
COMMENT

Hawkins